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Early Christians on Philosophy: A Religion Seeking Recognition in Greco-Roman Culture

Athens and Jerusalem – Still Something in Common

"What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" (*The Prescription Against Heretics* 7; *ANF* 3.246.) Thus asked Tertullian, an early Christian theologian from around 200 CE. Since Athens represented philosophy and Jerusalem the Christian faith, the question deals with the relationship between faith and philosophy. Tertullian's question is rhetorical, as is evident when read in its textual context. The unstated answer is self-evidently: "They have nothing do with each other." One can speak of a blatant misrecognition of philosophy. Nevertheless, the history of theology shows that philosophy became assimilated in the developing Christianity. Was it a later fall from the original "purity" or were there philosophical "seeds" in the beginning?

With his anti-philosophical ethos, Tertullian is not a unique case in the history of Western thought. One could list several names, but I will refer to just two cases after Tertullian who exemplify the continuing tradition after antiquity until modern times: Martin Luther and Bertrand Russell. Luther states that Aristotle is a heathen who "has caught and made fools" (*vorfuret und narret hat*) of even the best of the Christians. In a nutshell: "Using him God has plagued us for our sins" (*got hat uns also mit yhm plagt umb unser sund willen*)." Luther criticizes the use of Aristotle, whose understanding is limited, as the Holy Scriptures teach everything which is necessary.[1] Bertrand Russell makes the same division, but preferring philosophy to Scripture: "A good world needs knowledge, kindliness, and courage; it does not need a regretful hankering after the past or a fettering of the free intelligence by the words uttered long ago by ignorant men. It needs a fearless outlook and a free intelligence."[2] From ancient times to the present day, there seems to be a tradition of making a clear-cut separation between religion and philosophy.[3] In line with this tradition, Jerusalem and Athens withheld recognition from each other. The separation between religion and philosophy can be specified – at least from one important angle – as an opposition of free intellectual exploration and the Bible. Both Luther and Russell spoke of this opposition.

In this article, I will show that misrecognition is not the only available way of reading the situation. I concentrate on several New Testament texts often presented as a justification for the misrecognition of philosophy: Colossians 2, Acts 17 and 1 Corinthians 1–2. I argue that these texts actually make good use of the ancient philosophical discourse, so that one can read them as seeking recognition in the Greco-Roman intellectual culture. After that, I will briefly present Justin Martyr as an example of the intellectual and philosophical development of the early Christians. I will also show that the early Christians did not seek recognition in vain: during the second century, several non-Christian philosophers recognized Christianity as belonging to the category of philosophy,

[1] WA 6.458. On Luther's attitude towards Aristotle, see, e.g., Dieter 2001.
[2] Russell 1957, 23.
[3] On the relationship between religion and philosophy, see, e.g., Ebeling 1962.

despite whatever defects they saw in Christianity. Thus, if the origins of this debate on religion and philosophy have any significance for modern discussions, misrecognition is not the only possibility.

Tertullian justifies his misrecognition of philosophy with two references to the Bible (*The Prescription Against Heretics* 7; *ANF* 3.246). These verses are the only ones in the entire New Testament to mention philosophy and philosophers.[4] The first one is from the epistle to the Colossians:

> See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy (διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας) and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. (Col. 2:8.)

Tertullian emphasizes that Paul (or so he thinks – the epistle's authorship is a controversial topic[5]) explicitly names "philosophy as that which he would have us be on our guard against." The second biblical reference Tertullian uses is the story of Paul's visit to Athens:

> So he argued (διελέγετο) in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the market-place every day with those who happened to be there (ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ κατὰ πᾶσαν ἡμέραν πρὸς τοὺς παρατυγχάνοντας). Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (τινὲς δὲ καὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρείων καὶ Στοϊκῶν φιλοσόφων) debated with him. Some said, 'What does this babbler want to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities (ξένων δαιμονίων).' (Acts 17:17–18.)

On Paul, Tertullian notes: "He had been at Athens, and had in his interviews (with its philosophers) become acquainted with that human wisdom which pretends to know the truth, whilst it only corrupts it." As Acts mentions two different philosophical schools, Epicureans and Stoics, Tertullian hastens to argue that philosophy is "divided into its own manifold heresies, by the variety of its mutually repugnant sects." Commenting Paul's visit in Athens actually leads Tertullian to rhetorically ask: "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"

However, the suggested negative answer is prescriptive, not descriptive. Tertullian means that Athens and Jerusalem should not have anything in common – but, in fact, they have much in common. Tertullian's attack on philosophy is due to his attack on the other Christian theologians, whose views he did not accept. He blamed them for heresies arising from mixing up faith and philosophy. "Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition!" Tertullian exclaims. However, if mixing up philosophy and Christianity is a brand of heresy, Tertullian himself is heretical. It is widely known that his theology is deeply in debt to philosophy, especially to Stoicism. The polemics against philosophy is in fact nothing but

[4] In the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint), philosophers and philosophy are mentioned only in Dan. 1:20 and several times in 4 Macc. According to Otto Michel (1973, 176), in 4 Macc. 5 King Antiochus and the Jew Eleazar discuss if Judaism can be recognized as a philosophical life style (*als φιλοσοφεῖν anerkannt werden kann*).

[5] Most scholars assume that Colossians was written after Paul, despite the fact that the epistle presents itself as written by him. On the discussion, see standard scholarly commentaries on the epistle or, e.g., Leppä 2003.

polemics against heresies. Outside this constellation, he can "call on the Stoics also to help" and then praise Zeno of Citium, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus (*De Anima* 5; *ANF* 3.184–185).[6]

Tertullian's Biblical Warrants: Colossians and Acts

Tertullian's harsh criticism of philosophy seems rather an occasional rhetorical device than a conscious theological position. A careful reading also reveals that Tertullian's biblical references do not present an uncompromising position regarding philosophy. A few verses after condemning philosophy, the author of Colossians admonishes:

> Do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow (σκιά) of what is to come, but the substance (σῶμα) belongs to Christ. (Col. 2:16–17.)

A philosophically trained reader may notice that here we encounter a variation of Plato's allegory of the cave (*Republic* 514a–518b). Plato tells the story of people chained in a cave, where shadows on the walls are everything they know of the world outside. According to Plato, material facts are like the shadows of immaterial ideas. Colossians adapts the Platonic allegory to the apocalyptic, temporarily linear worldview. The true substance is to come, but its shadow is already visible in the present. Lacking this temporal dimension, Plato's allegory does not speak of the present and the future. Instead, the shadows and the ideas are present at the same time. Despite this difference, Colossians shares the contemporary philosophical discourse.[7]

The author of the Colossians adapts this allegory to her/his own purposes: Jewish ritual practices are but a shadow of the substance, and ignorance in these matters should not lead to condemnation – hinting at a potential conflict with Jewish Christians. A conflict is also present in Plato's text. The philosopher, who knows the ideas, "is forced to plead in the law courts, or anywhere else, about the shadows (σκιῶν) of justice, or the images whose shadows (σκιαί) they are, and dispute about it on the basis of how these things are understood by those who have never yet seen actual justice." (*Republic* 517d.)

If Colossians adheres to philosophy, how then should we understand its negative words on philosophy? It may well be that the negation is a rhetorical move, just as we saw in Tertullian's case. The other – and more probable explanation – is that the blame of philosophy by the author of Colossians does not involve general condemnation. Scholars usually note that the author is speaking of his/her adversaries and, thus, of their particular philosophy.[8] As the adversaries seem to be obliged to adhere to some Jewish ritual practices, it may seem extraordinary to call their views "philosophy." Yet, we have several examples of Judaism or some of its sects presented in that way.[9] This wide

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[6] On Tertullian's slogan, its interpretation and his use of philosophy, see, e.g., Osborn 1997, 27–47.
[7] Sometimes scholars note that the pair of σῶμα and σκιά is unusual, as one usually speaks of εἰκών instead of σῶμα. There are, however, other examples of pair of σῶμα and σκιά, too (see, e.g., O'Brien 1982, 139–140). Moreover, Plato does not use any fixed terminology for the substance in his allegory.
[8] Michel 1973, 183–184; Bormann 2012, 126.
[9] O'Brien 1982, 109; Bormann 2012, 127.

understanding of philosophy is by no means limited to Judaism. In fact, the separation between religion and philosophy is extraordinary in ancient culture. According to Pierre Hadot, even Epicureans who denied the vernacular beliefs participated in the cult.

> In antiquity, the philosopher encountered religion in his social life (in the form of the official cult) and in his cultural life (in the forms of art and of literature), yet he lived religion philosophically, by transforming it into philosophy. If Epicurus recommended participation in civic festivals and even prayer, this was to allow the Epicurean philosopher to contemplate the gods as conceived by the Epicurean theory of nature. […] The philosophical way of life never entered into competition with religion in antiquity, because at the time religion was not a way of life which included all of existence and all of inner life, as it was in Christianity.[10]

This philosophical attitude towards religion is present also in the philosophy which the author of Colossians opposes. Gregory E. Sterling notes how the Colossian philosophy coheres with the philosophical views of the Jewish Philo of Alexandria, who in turn owes much to the Middle Platonic demonology. Sterling supposes that the author of Colossians seemingly knew the Middle Platonic scale of being. "The scale they knew placed the angels or daemons in the intermediate zones between God and humanity. Their fasting practices suggest that they thought of these beings negatively: their asceticism served as a protection against injurious elemental spirits. It is likely that they observed their fasts in conjunction with a Jewish liturgical calendar."[11]

The Colossian philosophy is what Hadot describes as practicing religious rites with a philosophical mindset. The author of the epistle philosophically responds to this practice by placing such rites in the lower level of shadows. It remains unclear if this is a carefully considered answer to the scale of being. The scale cannot explain the temporal dimension introduced by the author, but this difficulty should not be overestimated. Hebrews (8:5; 10:1) contains temporal and non-temporal adaptation of the Platonic allegory, side by side. The discrepancy between the eschatological and non-eschatological adaptations is not enough to dismiss philosophical influences in Colossians. Both the author of Colossians and her/his adversaries seem to participate in a discussion, which one can describe as being philosophical in nature.

The case of Acts is clearer. When reading the episode in Athens, one cannot avoid remarking that its relationship with philosophy is much more positive than Tertullian claims. Actually, Paul's figure in the narrative intentionally hints at Socrates. This observation is commonplace among scholars.[12] David M. Reis has called Acts 17 an echo chamber, which not only provides an opportunity to hear Socratic echoes in the figure of Paul, but also Pauline echoes in the figure of Socrates. Justin Martyr employed the latter when describing Socrates as Paul at Areopagus (2 *Apology* 10; *ANF* 1.191).[13]

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[10] Hadot 2002, 271–272. See Maisch 2003, 153: *"Philosophie bezeichnet im Hellenismus nicht ein theoretisches Lehrgebäude, sondern ein umfassendes System, das Weltdeutung, Identitätsstiftung, Spiritualität, Einsicht in den rechten Lebensvollzug und sogar magische Praktiken in sich vereinigt."*

[11] Sterling 1998, 270.

[12] Sandnes 1993, 20.

[13] Reis 2002, 260, 273–274.

With the help of Socratic echoes, the Areopagus episode positions Christian identity within the Greco-Roman intellectual culture and, thus, it sets a standard for the recognition the Christians sought among the philosophers.

The author of Acts[14] opens the episode by narrating Paul's sightseeing in Athens. The apostle roams in public every day, arguing (διελέγετο) in the synagogue and in the marketplace (ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ) with "those who happen to be there." This is what Socrates did:

> Socrates lived ever in the open; for early in the morning he went to the public promenades and training grounds; in the forenoon he was seen in the market (ἀγορᾶς); and the rest of the day he passed just where most people were to be met: he was generally talking, and anyone might listen. (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.10.)
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> If any one, whether young or old, wishes to hear me speaking and pursuing my mission, I have never objected, nor do I converse (διαλέγομαι) only when I am paid and not otherwise. (Plato, *Apologia* 33a)

Paul is reproached for being "a proclaimer of foreign divinities (ξένων δαιμονίων)," Socrates for proclaiming "novel divinities" (καινὰ δαιμόνια) (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.1; Plato, *Apologia* 24c). When the story continues in Acts, Paul is taken to Areopagus to report his teaching (Acts 17:19). Again, Luke's choice of words echoes the story of Socrates, who was sentenced to death there. In Paul's time, Areopagus possibly functioned as a city council,[15] but this is a moot point. The name Areopagus in the story merely serves to create a new echo of Socrates. Even Luke's ambiguous word choice is evocative. The verb ἐπιλαμβάνομαι may mean 'arrest,' but also well-intentioned attachment.[16] Luke "appears simply to evoke the image of trial and arrest, allowing it to resonate in the reader's mind without feeling need to make the connection explicit."[17] At Areopagus, both Socrates and Paul began their speeches with the words "Men of Athens" (ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι) (Plato, *Apology* 17a; Acts 17:22).

As a result, one can easily agree with Sandnes' observation that there is "a firm basis for saying that the prelude to the Areopagus speech involves a clear comparison between Paul and Socrates." Sandnes emphasizes that the readers have been aware of this comparison as Socrates' figure was well-known. Sandnes cites Lucian's words to illustrate the situation: "His praises are sung by everyone" (*Dream* 12).[18] Socrates' reputation was true, but some did not praise him. Scholars have mainly missed that Luke uses the Socratic echoes to locate Paul more closely with one of the two mentioned philosophical schools: namely, closer to the Stoics than the Epicureans. The Stoics eagerly invoked Socrates while the Epicureans despised him. According to A. A. Long, "from Zeno to Epictetus, that is to say throughout the history of the Stoa, Socrates is the philosopher with whom the Stoics most closely aligned themselves." Three stories of Zeno's (the founder of the Stoic school) devotion to philosophy point out that Socrates inspired him one way or another. Long accurately notes

[14] In fact, we do not know the name of the author who is responsible for Acts and the Gospel bearing Luke's name. The scholarly commentaries discuss the question of authorship.
[15] Barrett 2004, 831–832.
[16] Barrett 2004, 831.
[17] Reis 2002, 270–271.
[18] Sandnes 1993, 22.

the function of these diverging accounts: "The literal truth of these stories is unimportant. What they attest to is a tradition, which Zeno's followers must have encouraged, that Socrates was the primary inspiration of his philosophy." One source even claims that the Stoics wanted to be called Socratics.[19] The contrary was true of the Epicureans:

> If Epicurus was fairly restrained in his remarks about Socrates, his immediate followers were not. From Metrodorus and Idomeneus, extending through Zeno of Sidon and Philodemus down to Diogenes of Oenoanda, a tradition of hostility to Socrates was established that is virulent even by the standards of ancient polemic. In their writings, Socrates was portrayed as the complete anti-Epicurean – a sophist, a rhetorician, a sceptic, and someone whose ethical inquiries turn human life into chaos.[20]

Thus, Paul's Socratic characterization associates the apostle with the Stoics. This association becomes clearer in the speech Luke has him deliver at Areopagus. Of the several Stoic themes of the speech,[21]it is enough to mention only one, the quotation: "For we too are his offspring (τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν)" (Acts 17:28). These words belong to the opening verses of the poem *Phaenomena* by the Stoic Aratus:

> From Zeus let us begin; him do we mortals never leave unnamed; full of Zeus are all the streets and all the market-places of men; full is the sea and the havens thereof; always we all have need of Zeus. For we are also his offspring (τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος εἰμέν). (Aratus, *Phaenomena* 1–5.)

Aratus' poem was famous and celebrated in antiquity. Its reputation is illustrated by the fact that the poem was translated several times into Latin (for example, by Cicero and Ovid).[22] The Jew Aristobulus of Alexandria cited it in the 2nd century BCE, which shows that the poem was also known within the Jewish boundaries (Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 13.12.1–8). Aratus' Stoic idea of God permeating the whole universe accords well with the Areopagus speech, in which Paul preaches: "In him [= God] we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). However, at the end of his speech Paul diverges from the Stoics by saying that God has overlooked ignorance until now (17:30). This is an implicit placing of the Stoics among other ignorant people. The sudden turn of the speech after a Stoic-sounding proclamation is a slap in the face of the Stoics, who claimed to know the truth and – contrary to the Sceptics – claimed that virtue is nothing else than knowledge.[23] The Stoics associated their teaching with Socrates, but the Socrates figure here nullifies their knowledge. In a way, Paul fulfills Socrates' prophecy: "You would pass the rest of your lives in

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[19] Long 1988, 151, 160–161. Long (1988, 150) also states: "Socrates' presence in Epictetus' *Discourses* – which I must pass over here – could be the topic of a monograph." This task was completed in 2002 in his book *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life.*

[20] Long 1988, 155.

[21] Scholars routinely note the Stoic coloring of the speech. See, e.g., Barrett 2004. This does not exclude, however, the possibility of also finding parallels with the Jewish texts.

[22] Fantuzzi 1996, 959–960.

[23] Long 1988, 158.

slumber, unless God, in his care for you, should send someone else to sting you" (Plato, *Apology* 31a).[24] Paul is the prophesied person in Luke' narration, the real follower of Socrates.

From the perspective of seeking recognition, the Areopagus episode is interesting. Paul debates with philosophers with the consequence that he is challenged to report his teaching at Areopagus. It is as if the Athenians were considering their recognition of Paul. Paul, in turn, seeks recognition by adhering to the Stoics in his speech. At the end of the speech, the constellation turns upside down: Paul proclaims that everything up to that point is ignorance. The apostle assumes the role of granting or withholding recognition – in this case the latter. The audience becomes irritated with Paul's idea of resurrection. They seemingly interrupt the speech, and, in turn, withhold their recognition. Only a small group joins Paul, like those who remained faithful to Socrates during his trial (Plato, *Apology* 38b; Xenophon, *Apologia* 27–28). The mutual misrecognition, however, is not the whole story. In the eyes of the reader, through the character of Paul, Christianity has attained its place among the philosophical schools. Ries comments aptly:

> Luke constructs a Socratic Paul who deftly negotiates among his enemies with rhetorical skill, first by developing an argument for reality of the one true God based on common Hellenistic philosophical principles, and then by proclaiming the decidedly Christian teaching about the resurrection and judgment, which elicits among his audience consternation, intrigue, and conversion.[25]

Paradoxically, the fact that the encounter with philosophers at Areopagus ends up in mutual misrecognition may have resulted in Christianity being located among the philosophers. Hubert Cancik notes that the recurrent disputes in Acts elevated Christianity from a cult to a philosophical school:

> It is furthermore highly remarkable, so far as I see, that this kind of dispute over unity, inheritance, and continuity does not occur in Greek and Roman religion. Controversies over "worldview", moral behavior, the relation of the individual to the state, marriage, work, war, and death, so far as these can be rationalized, are dealt with in Greco-Roman culture by means of philosophy, not religion.[26]

Luke's picture of Paul disputing with philosophers did not propagate an anti-philosophical tendency. The episode is a claim of Christianity as the most truthful philosophy, which surpasses other schools. Tertullian's anti-philosophical reading of this text seems more than questionable. I will still widen the discussion on the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, which Tertullian did not use, but which are often thought of as representing an anti-philosophical attitude.

1 Corinthians – Philosophical Folly in the World

[24] One may note that the idea of a prophecy did not sound strange to Stoic ears. The Stoics firmly believed in divination, and Cicero tells that the Stoic Antipater "gathered a mass of remarkable premonitions received by Socrates" (*De divinatione* 1.123).
[25] Ries 2002, 272–273.
[26] Cancik 1997, 693.

"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Paul[27] asks rhetorically (1 Cor. 1:20). The answer is affirmative, as Paul points out several times in 1 Corinthians 1–2. After the salutation, Paul shortly relates what he has heard of Corinthians and then, from 1:18 onwards, proceeds to his criticism of worldly wisdom: The Greeks have searched for wisdom without acknowledging God. Therefore, God decided to save the world through foolishness (μωρία), through the proclamation of Christ crucified. Paul stresses that he did not proclaim "in lofty words or wisdom" (2:1). He even denies knowing something, with one exception: "I decided to know nothing (οὐ γὰρ ἔκρινά τι εἰδέναι) among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (2:2). Yet, Paul's proclamation, indeed, is wisdom: not "a wisdom of this age" (2:6), but God's wisdom so that "faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God (ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ)" (2:5). Christians, he says, speak "in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit."

In his commentary, Gordon D. Fee summarizes the main thesis of 1 Corinthians 1–2: "The gospel is not some new *sophia* (wisdom, or philosophy), not even a new divine *sophia*. For *Sophia* allows for human judgments or evaluations of God's activity."[28] What is this but a total misrecognition of philosophy? Should Tertullian refer to this text? No. When Paul's words are put into a philosophical context, they no longer seem so anti-philosophical. My aim is to show that there are several contact points with philosophy and that Paul's text therefore participates in philosophical discourse. I mostly cite Plato, but this does not indicate Paul's particular attachment to Platonism. Plato's texts were also used outside of the Platonic school and interpreted differently by various schools.[29] Instead of showing Paul's affinity to a certain philosophical school,[30] I generally argue that the ostensibly anti-philosophical words actually belong to the philosophical discourse.

Fee's claim that the gospel is no divine *sophia* is forced. In fact, he later has to admit that Paul speaks of the divine wisdom as an opposition to the human wisdom. Fee explains that Paul "transformed 'wisdom' from a philosophical, rhetorical term into a historical, soteriological one."[31] True, Paul identified salvific wisdom with the crucified Christ; thus, divine wisdom really is historical and soteriological. I argue, however, that these features do not rule out philosophy. One can find a similar opposition between human and divine wisdom in Plato's texts. In *Apology*, Socrates states that Apollo claimed him to be the wisest human being. Socrates wanted to prove this claim wrong – without success. Socrates explains: "the god is really wise and by his oracle means this: 'Human wisdom (ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία) is of little or no value'" (Plato, *Apology* 23a). Here the most famous representative of ancient philosophy differentiates between divine and human wisdom.

Plato's *Sophist* repeats the same opposition, adapting it to the division between the philosophers and the sophists. The latter imitate the former and, therefore, what the sophists represent is "not divine, but

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[27] Contrary to Colossians, the authorship of 1 Corinthians is not disputed. The author is Paul himself.
[28] Fee 1987, 68, 98.
[29] Long 1988, 152. For example, Long (2002, 70) suggests that the Stoic Epictetus "knew the *Gorgias* more or less by heart."
[30] Some have seen similarities between Paul and the Stoics (e.g., Engberg-Pedersen 2000 and 2010; Huttunen 2009; Thorsteinsson 2010), others between Paul and the Platonists (e.g., van Kooten 2008; Wasserman 2008). Downing (1998) prefers the Cynic Paul.
[31] Fee 1987, 73.

human" (οὐ θεῖον ἀλλ᾽ ἀνθρωπικὸν) (Plato, *Sophist* 268c–d). The background is Plato's theory of ideas: unlike the true philosophers, the sophists just imitate the divine wisdom of ideas. As imitators, the sophists are on the worldly level. In 1 Corinthians, Paul does not represent the Platonic theory of ideas. Nevertheless, the opposition between human and divine wisdom is present in both Plato's and Paul's texts. This similarity is quite general, but it proves that the differentiation between divine and human wisdom created by Paul should not be straightforwardly explained as anti-philosophical.

Plato's dialogue *Ion*[32] comes closer to Paul, who associates divine wisdom with the power of God. *Ion* is a dialogue between Socrates and Ion, who is specialized in performing Homer's poetry. We are told that Ion is not at all interested in other poets and cannot even form any clear opinions about them. Socrates infers that Ion is not skilled in the art of poetry. If he were, he would have been able to perform any poetry. As this is not the case, the conclusion is that Ion's skill to perform poetry – or anyone's, for that matter – cannot be of human origin. The skill must originate via divine influence, that is, divine power.

> For not by art do they utter these things, but by divine influence (θείᾳ δυνάμει); since, if they had fully learnt by art to speak on one kind of theme, they would know how to speak on all. And for this reason God takes away the mind of these men and uses them as his ministers, just as he does soothsayers and godly seers, in order that we who hear them may know that it is not they who utter these words of great price, when they are out of their wits, but that it is God himself who speaks and addresses us through them. (Plato, *Ion* 534c–d.)

One may recall that in *Republic*, Plato openly expresses his disgust of poetry, which is just an imitation of reality: "Starting with Homer, all composers of poetry are imitators of images of virtue and of every other subject they deal with, but they don't grasp the truth" (*Republic* 600e). Thus, poetry as an imitation is on the level of sophistic arguments. It is thus possible, though not obvious, that Plato's praise of the divine inspiration in *Ion* is ironic: in reality, Plato would hint that poetry is nothing but foolishness.[33] Be that as it may, Plato is not the only philosopher to present the concept of divine power. In Xenophon's version of Socrates' *Apology*, Socrates says that the *daimonion* speaking to him is no novel idea, as people traditionally believe in omens coming through birds, thunder, and Pythia.

> The only difference between them and me is that whereas they call the sources of their forewarning 'birds,' 'utterances,' 'chance meetings,' 'prophets,' I call mine a 'divine' thing (δαιμόνιον), and I think that in using such a term I am speaking with greater truth and piety than those who ascribe the gods' power to birds (τῶν τοῖς ὄρνισιν ἀνατιθέντων τὴν τῶν θεῶν δύναμιν). (Xenophon, *Apology* 13.)

A later philosopher presenting the idea of divine power can be found in the text of the Stoic Epictetus at the beginning of the 2nd century CE. Epictetus may be dependent on Xenophon's words, as his

[32] It is possible that *Ion* was not written by Plato himself, but somewhat after him (Thesleff 1982, 221–223).
[33] Thesleff 1982, 222.

argumentation is quite similar.[34] Epictetus creates an opposition between the divine and the human message, and the former originates in divine power.

> Once you have heard these words go away and say to yourself, "It was not Epictetus who said these things to me; why, how could they have occurred to him? but it was some kindly god or other speaking through him. For it would not have occurred to Epictetus to say these things, because he is not in the habit of speaking to anyone. Come then, let us obey God, that we rest not under His wrath." Nay, but if a raven gives you a sign by his croaking, it is not the raven that gives the sign, but God through the raven; whereas if He gives you a sign through a human voice, will you pretend that it is the man who is saying these things to you, so that you may remain ignorant of the power of the divinity (τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ δαιμονίου), that He gives signs to some men in this way, and to others in that, but that in the greatest and most sovereign matters He gives His sign through His noblest messenger (διὰ καλλίστου ἀγγέλου) [= Hermes; Epictetus continues by citing *Odyssey*]? (Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.1.36–37.)

Epictetus does not seriously claim to be an oracle in the normal sense of the word.[35] However, he surely understood his philosophical message as divine wisdom, which makes the comparison to oracles understandable. As a Stoic, Epictetus believed in the god within, which he calls by many names. Here he speaks of the power of δαιμονίον, which denotes the divine and the rational part of the human being.[36] Thus, "the power of the divinity" simply means human rationality. This is not what Paul thinks.[37] However, Paul's concept of divine spirit abiding within Christians comes close. He makes it clear that the Spirit boosts cognitive capacity (1 Cor. 2:10–16).[38] Stoics could also call the divinity spirit (πνεῦμα), though the word is quite rare in Epictetus' usage.[39]

Finally, I would like to treat Paul's report of his earlier sojourn, found in 1 Corinthians: "I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing (οὐ γὰρ ἔκρινά τι εἰδέναι) among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1–2).[40] Fee understands this non-knowing as a rejection of philosophical reasoning,[41] but even this saying has its parallel in Plato's *Apology* (21b,d): "I am conscious that I am not wise either much or little," and "Neither of us really knows anything fine and good, but this man thinks he knows

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[34] Long (1988, 151) holds it certain that "Epictetus has reflected hard on the Socratic writings of Plato and Xenophon."
[35] Huttunen 2009, 21.
[36] Bonhöffer 1890, 83–86. Bonhöffer's work is still worth consulting, despite its age. He profoundly contextualizes the philosophical concepts Epictetus uses.
[37] In Romans, there is a closer parallel to Epictetus. Paul presents the devotion to the rational cult (τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν) as an ideal (Rom. 12:1), similarly to Epictetus (*Discourses* 1.6.20).
[38] On the cognitive role of the Spirit and its relationship to Stoicism, see Engberg-Pedersen 2010, 76–80.
[39] *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* 1.121.6; 2.112.31; 2.299.11; 2.306.21; 2.307.21. In Epictetus' texts, the word πνεῦμα or its derivatives occur only in *Discourses* 2.1.17; 2.23.3; 3.3.22; 3.13.15.
[40] Paul's word order is somewhat surprising. The more precise translation may be "I did not decide to know something…," but I do not see any difference in the meaning. On the translation, see Thiselton 2000, 211–212.
[41] Fee 1987, 92.

something when he does not, whereas I, as I do not know anything, do not think I do either (ἡμῶν οὐδέτερος οὐδὲν καλὸν κἀγαθὸν εἰδέναι, ἀλλ᾽ οὗτος μὲν οἴεταί τι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς, ἐγὼ δέ, ὥσπερ οὖν οὐκ οἶδα, οὐδὲ οἴομαι)." The last sentence in particular sounds similar to Paul.[42]

Both Socrates and Paul reflect on their knowledge and make decisions accordingly. Paul, however, does not claim to be ignorant, but reports about his decision to be ignorant except in what comes to Christ. Anthony A. Thiselton is right when he states that this interpretation releases Paul from any anti-intellectualism.[43] Yet, if ignorance is anti-intellectualism, is Socrates anti-intellectual? It depends on the philosophical school. As it turns out, the Sceptic school "invented" the Socrates who knows nothing. Conversely, the Stoic Socrates knows a lot of things.[44] It is difficult to say what Paul's position on these epistemological questions was – if he had strong attachments to any position. It is possible, however, that his words echo these discussions.

In sum, it seems plausible that Paul was partaking in the general philosophical discourse. The division between worldly and divine wisdom is present in the philosophical texts. Plato, Xenophon, and Epictetus refer to divine power. Although Paul emphasized his ignorance (except in matters of Christ), he does not seem to reject knowledge – and if he did, he would come close to the Sceptic school. These similarities do not diminish the dissimilarities. For example, Paul and Epictetus share a conviction of divine power within human beings, but Paul restricts it to Christians, who are the only ones to receive the divine Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12). Stoics thought spirit to be present in every human being. Dissimilarities between Paul and Epictetus are clear, but there are also dissimilarities, say, between Plato and Epictetus. I cannot see that Paul's discourse categorically deviates from the philosophical discourse.

This being the case, I would like to question the traditional reading of 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. Paul does not try to deviate from philosophy. He is not presenting a categorical alternative to what is earlier presented in the philosophy. Quite the contrary, he joins in the contemporary philosophical discourse. In fact, Paul's words against the specious human wisdom can be seen as a search for recognition in the intellectual culture. In this discourse, truth was presented as a divine essence and as an opposite to worldly wisdom. Paul presents himself as the most truthful philosopher, a messenger by the divine call (κλητὸς ἀπόστολος) (1 Cor. 1:1), who reliably presents the divine mysteries, "God's wisdom, secret and hidden" (1 Cor. 2:7). His revelatory character or invocation of the authority of the Septuagint do not make him deviant, either. Pierre Hadot describes the character of schools in the imperial period. Among many philosophers, natural revelation "was augmented by what the Greeks have always believed: revelations made by gods to a few inspired mortals." The texts of Plato, Xenophon, and Epictetus which I have quoted exemplify this well. "Also sought-after were revelations made to the barbarians: Jews, Egyptians, Assyrians, and inhabitants of India." Philosophical teaching took the form of commenting on authoritative texts.[45] In this tradition, 1 Corinthians 1–2 is no misrecognition of philosophy.

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[42] The former sentence (οὔτε μέγα οὔτε σμικρὸν ξύνοιδα ἐμαυτῷ σοφὸς ὤν) is close to 1 Cor. 4:4 (οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐμαυτῷ σύνοιδα).
[43] Thiselton 2000, 212.
[44] On the Sceptic and the Stoic interpretations of Socrates, see Long 1988, 156–160.
[45] Hadot 2002, 149–153.

Mutual Recognition Becomes Mainstream

About one hundred years after Paul, the Christian apologist Justin Martyr wrote about his conversion to Christianity. After vainly seeking the truth in numerous philosophical schools, one day he encountered a mysterious old man on a lonely shore. The characterization of the old man hints at the figure of Socrates and, in a sense, Socrates becomes the midwife of Justin's conversion.[46] The man tells him about Christianity and then leaves, but not without making a lasting impression:

> I have not seen him since. But straightway a flame was kindled in my soul; and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me; and whilst revolving his words in my mind, I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable. Thus, and for this reason, I am a philosopher. (*Dialogue with Trypho* 8; *ANF* 1.198.)

Justin's conversion to Christianity was no abrupt shift from philosophy to religion. "Justin's new identity as a Christian philosopher became readily integrated with his identity as a Platonist."[47] His recognition of philosophy becomes clear when he assesses it quite positively. Christianity, the true philosophy, was fragmentarily present already in the ancient tradition: "There seem to be seeds of truth among all men; but they are charged with not accurately understanding [the truth] when they assert contradictories" (*First Apology* 44; *ANF* 1.177). As there were excellent pre-Christian philosophers, Justin reasons that they must have been Christians. They namely stuck to reason, which he identifies with Christ (cf. John 1:1–3). "He [Christ] is the Word (λόγον ὄντα) of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably (μετὰ λόγου) are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them" (Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 46; *ANF* 1.178). In this way, Justin baptizes the Greek intellectual tradition by saying that Christianity does not contradict but completes it. This apologetic strategy to seek recognition in the Greco-Roman intellectual milieu continued after Justin.[48]

The standard picture is that Paul's, Justin's and other Christians' bold claims of Christianity as the supreme philosophy were received with disgust.[49] Three famous accounts of Christians are quoted time and again: those of Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44.2–5), Suetonius (*Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, Nero 16) and Pliny the Younger (*Epistles* 10.96), according to which Christianity is a criminal superstition. However, this is only a partial truth. The Stoic Epictetus, the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, the satirist Lucian, and Galen (the famous physician and philosopher) described Christians more or less positively. The chief indicator of recognition is the fact that Christians are assessed in the category of philosophers – albeit with certain failures. The most positive is Galen, who explicitly mentions "the school of Moses and Christ" (Μωϋσοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ διατριβή) (*De pulsuum*

[46] Thorsteinsson 2012, 496, 502.
[47] Thorsteinsson 2012, 509; cf. Klostergaard Petersen 2017, 11–12: "Justin did not conceive of Christianity as something so different from philosophy that it would preclude a description of Christianity in terms of philosophy."
[48] Hadot 2002, 239–240.
[49] See, e.g., Cook 2010, 2.

differentiis; Kühn 8, p. 579). Although Christians belong to the people who are unable to follow demonstrative arguments, they have attained virtue "not inferior to that of genuine philosophers."[50]

It would require a more profound analysis to position early Christianity in the intellectual map of the ancient philosophical schools. However, I dare to claim that the biblical texts presented as anti-philosophical actually participate in ancient philosophical discourse. None of the texts (Colossians 2, Acts 17, 1 Corinthians 1–2) present a blatant misrecognition of philosophy in the manner of Tertullian's Jerusalem/Athens opposition. Justin proves that by the mid-2nd century at the latest, a Christian could recognize himself as a philosopher. But this development must have begun earlier. The epistle to the Colossians attests that around the year 100 CE, some Christians called their conviction "philosophy." Around the same time, Luke "Socratized" Paul, and in the early 2nd century, Epictetus included the Christians in the category of philosophy, in spite of whatever deficiencies Christianity had from his Stoic point of view.

Early Christians recognized ancient philosophy as a legitimate part of their faith and searched for recognition in their intellectual milieu. The relationship was not equal, as Christianity was a novelty in Greco-Roman culture. Some pagan authors attest to disgust of Christianity. This, however, is not the whole picture. From the early 2nd century onwards, we have also information of pagans granting recognition to Christians. This was the strengthening development, which led finally to the Christianization of the whole Greco-Roman intellectual world in the following centuries. The tradition separating philosophy and religion does not recognize this strong and – I would say – mainstream course of Western history.

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[50] Huttunen 2013 and 2017. Translation of Galen's text is based on several versions, see Walzer 1949, 15–16.

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